

**Amendments to the Claims:**

1. (Currently amended): A topical composition comprising:  
at least about 5% (w/v) ascorbic acid;  
non-toxic zinc salt; and  
water, wherein at least 10% of the ascorbic acid is provided in the composition as a concentrated ascorbic acid solution which is prepared by heating ascorbic acid in water to about 60° to about 90° C and cooling to below about 40° C to provide a concentrated ascorbic acid solution, wherein the composition has is adjusted to a pH of about 3.5 to about 4.1.
2. (Canceled).
3. (Previously Presented): The composition of claim 1, wherein the composition has a pH of about 3.7 to about 4.0.
4. (Original): The composition of claim 1, further comprising an anti-inflammatory compound.
5. (Original): The composition of claim 4, wherein the anti-inflammatory compound includes sulfur-containing anti-inflammatory compound.
6. (Original): The composition of claim 5, wherein the sulfur-containing anti-inflammatory compound is selected from the group consisting of cystine, cysteine, N-acetylcysteine, glutathione, cysteamine, S-methylcysteine, methionine and mixtures thereof.
7. (Original): The composition of claim 4, wherein the anti-inflammatory compound includes aminosugar.
8. (Original): The composition of claim 7, wherein the aminosugar includes glucosamine, mannosamine, N-acetylmannosamine, galactosamine, glucosamine-6-phosphate, N-acetylglucosamine, N-acetylmannosamine, N-acetylgalactosamine and mixtures thereof.
9. (Canceled).
10. (Original): The composition of claim 1, wherein the water is selected from the group consisting of distilled water, deionized water, distilled deionized water and mixtures thereof.

11. (Previously Presented): The composition of claim 1, wherein the non-toxic zinc salt is present in an amount ranging from about 0.5% to about 5% (w/v).
12. (Original): The composition of claim 11, wherein the non-toxic zinc salt is zinc sulfate.
13. (Canceled).
14. (Canceled).
15. (Original): The composition of claim 1, wherein the water is distilled or deionized water.
16. (Previously Presented): The composition of claim 1, further comprising a pharmaceutically acceptable carrier.
17. (Original): The composition of claim 15, wherein the pharmaceutically acceptable carrier includes alkylene glycol, hydroxyalkylcellulose or a mixture thereof.
18. (Currently Amended): A topical composition comprising:  
an aqueous solution including at least about 5.0% (w/v) pre-treated ascorbic acid, wherein at least 10% of the ascorbic acid is provided in the composition as a concentrated ascorbic acid solution which is prepared by heating ascorbic acid in water to about 60° to about 90° C and cooling to below about 40° C to provide a concentrated ascorbic acid solution; and  
a non -toxic zinc salt; and  
said composition having a pH that is adjusted to ~~of~~ about 3.5 to about 4.1.
19. (Canceled).
20. (Canceled).
21. (Original): The composition of claim 18, further comprising a stimulant of protein synthesis.
22. (Canceled).
23. (Original): The composition of claim 18, further comprising a precursor of melanin synthesis.
24. (Previously Presented): The composition of claim 18, further comprising about 15% to about 25% (w/v) ascorbic acid.
25. (Original): The composition of claim 18, wherein the topical composition is an aqueous solution, a serum, a lotion, an ointment, a cream, or a gel.
26. (Canceled).
27. (Canceled).
28. (Canceled).

29. (Canceled).
30. (Canceled).
31. (Canceled).
32. (New): A concentrated ascorbic acid solution preparation for use in a topical composition comprising:  
an aqueous solution comprising at least 20% (w/v) ascorbic acid prepared by heating ascorbic acid in water to about 60° to about 90° C and cooling to below about 40° C to provide a concentrated ascorbic acid solution, wherein the pH of the concentrated solution preparation is about 2.0 to about 2.5.
33. (New): The preparation of claim 32 wherein said water is selected from the group consisting of distilled water, deionized water, distilled deionized water and mixtures thereof.
34. (New): A method of preparing a concentrated ascorbic acid solution for use in a topical composition comprising:  
heating an aqueous solution comprising at least 20% (w/v) ascorbic acid to about 60° to about 90° C, and  
cooling to below about 40° C to provide a concentrated ascorbic acid solution, wherein the pH of the concentrated solution is about 2.0 to about 2.5.
35. (New): The method of claim 34 wherein said water is selected from the group consisting of distilled water, deionized water, distilled deionized water and mixtures thereof.